

Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 93

RESOLUTION CHAPTER 57

Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 93—Relative to William Saroyan Year.

[Filed with Secretary of State June 4, 2008.]

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

SCR 93, Cogdill. William Saroyan Year.

This measure would designate the year 2008 as the William Saroyan Year for enriching the cultural diversity of the state, and in particular, for celebrating over 100 years of the cultural contribution of Armenian Americans to the people of the state.

WHEREAS, William Saroyan was born in Fresno, California in 1908. Saroyan was the fourth child of Armenian immigrants. He embraced his culture's distinctive qualities as an inspiration to his writing. Saroyan's cultural celebration was most notably apparent in his 1940 story, "My Name Is Aram." This book exemplifies the life and times of the California central valley during the mid-20th century; and

WHEREAS, Saroyan died from cancer on May 18, 1981, in Fresno at the age of 72, about a mile from where he was born. His lasting words to the press in the face of the inevitable were, "Everybody has got to die ... but I have always believed an exception would be made in my case." Half of his ashes were buried in the Ararat Cemetery in Fresno and the remaining was interred in Yerevan, Armenia; and

WHEREAS, Published in 1943, Saroyan's novel, "The Human Comedy," was adapted for the silver screen, starring Mickey Rooney. The film received five Oscar nominations, and won Saroyan the award for Best Writing Original Screen Story; and

WHEREAS, Based on an Armenian folk tune, Saroyan cowrote "Come On-a My House," along with his cousin Ross Bagdasarian. It was the song that catapulted the career of Rosemary Clooney; and

WHEREAS, Saroyan was among the most famous American writers of the 1930s and 1940s, and has over 4,000 literary works to his credit, beginning in the late 1920s to the early 1980s, and has long been established as one of America's most gifted and influential writers. At one time, the Armenian American writer was mentioned in the same breath as Ernest Hemingway and John Steinbeck; and

WHEREAS, Saroyan was the first American writer to win both the New York Drama Critic's Circle Award and the Pulitzer Prize for his play, "The Time of Your Life" (1939); and

WHEREAS, Saroyan's theatrical works continue to be performed today at prominent theatrical venues, including New York's Broadway stages, the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, and local theaters throughout the United States; and

WHEREAS, Saroyan, a humanitarian, wrote extensively about his concern for humanity. Excerpts include: "If I have any desire at all, it is to show the brotherhood of man." "In the time of your life, live - so that in that wondrous time you shall not add to the misery and sorrow of the world, but shall smile to the infinite variety and mystery of it." "Seek goodness everywhere, and when it is found, bring it out of its hiding place and let it be free and unashamed." "It is the heart of man that I am trying to imply in this work. I see life as one life at one time, so many millions simultaneously, all over the earth." "Encourage virtue in whatever heart it may have been driven into secrecy and sorrow by the shame and terror of the world"; and

WHEREAS, Saroyan's corpus of total artistic work includes plays, novels, short stories, musical lyrics, drawings, and paintings; and

WHEREAS, Over 40 organizations throughout the state have come together to celebrate the 100th birthday anniversary of the acclaimed author and playwright with lectures, theatrical performances, art exhibitions, and writing contests; and

WHEREAS, While Saroyan's writing in general is particularly renowned among fellow Armenians, "The Armenian and the Armenian" is an especially stirring declaration of solidarity. The piece is set during the Armenian Genocide, in which over 1,500,000 Armenians were killed. The words evoke notes of grief, rage, resilience, and rebirth, in relation to Armenian cultural and social life. A famous excerpt reads: "I should like to see any power of the world destroy this race, this small tribe of unimportant people, whose wars have all been fought and lost, whose structures have crumbled, literature is unread, music is unheard, and prayers are no more answered. Go ahead, destroy Armenia. See if you can do it. Send them into the desert without bread or water. Burn their homes and churches. Then see if they will not laugh, sing and pray again. For when two of them meet anywhere in the world, see if they will not create a New Armenia"; now, therefore, be it

Resolved by the Senate of the State of California, the Assembly thereof concurring, That the Legislature designates the year 2008 as the William Saroyan Year for enriching the cultural diversity of the state, and in particular, for celebrating over 100 years of the cultural contribution of Armenian Americans to the people of the state; and be it further

Resolved, That the Secretary of the Senate transmit copies of this resolution to the author for appropriate distribution.